

CHAPTER I

THE GEORGIAN LAND AND THE NATURE OF
MOUNT CAUCASUS

It is a fitting thing, although somewhat in the nature of a pilgrimage, to come upon Georgia from the north. From Vladikavkaz—"Ruler of the Caucasus"—you may follow by motor-bus the track which they say the Cimmerians rode with their ox-carts and their families against Urartu and Sardes. The Russians by an efficient feat of engineering have turned this track into the Georgian Military Road. It is a narrow, trough-like channel over the Caucasus, which at Daryal contracts to a deep gorge, the rock walls of the confining mountains rising sheer to thousands of feet on either side. The pass, even in summer, is cold and wet, and at the summit it had been recently cleared of snow. With the southern decline the road follows the shallow, dashing stream of the Aragvi, and the heavily wooded mountains of Khevsureti drop gradually into the rounded hills and gently sloping valleys of ancient Kartli.

The whole mellow land of Georgia lies before, with its fresh meadows and its lusty uplands, its bright vineyards and its sombre woods, its warm gracious sun and sudden-looming storms. Georgia, like some other countries, has a colour. Ireland is green and grey. Morocco is all red. Georgia is a fine yellow gold like the white wines of Burgundy. The impression of the colour is partly of the sunlight and partly of the tincture of the soil, but also there is some property in the atmosphere, intangible and not easily described, a bouquet, almost imperceptible, which envelops and caresses, fragrant and soft, insidious. The Greeks spoke of the Land of the Golden Fleece, it is supposed because of the scant alluvial gold, filtered in sheepskins from the beds of the westward-flowing streams of Caucasus. But it may be that their fancy thus imaged as a Golden Fleece that aureous hue which lies over all the country like,